Amendments to the Specification

Please replace the following paragraphs in the Specification with the following replacement paragraphs:

The second full paragraph on page 9, beginning approximately at line 40:

The danger to health care workers and others outside the health care profession from accidental needle sticks has yielded the development of catheters with safety mechanisms in which the occurrence of such accidental needle sticks is prevented. An example of a catheter having a safety mechanism is disclosed in US Patent No. Re. 34,416 issued to Lemieux. A safety catheter is described which includes an element that covers the needle tip upon removal of the needle from the catheter. The safety element includes a split flange at its proximal end which is expanded by the needle as the needle is inserted into an undersized hole at the center of this flange. The safety element is thus held secure within the catheter hub by inserting the needle through the undersized hole which forces the outside perimeter of the split flange against the inside wall of the catheter hub. One of the drawbacks to this design is the amount of friction force exerted against the needle by the split flange. A tight fit of the flange against the catheter wall causes great friction against the needle making it difficult to be withdrawn from the catheter by the clinician. A ~~lose~~ loose fit leaves the flange prone to releasing prematurely from the catheter as the needle is withdrawn, creating the potential that the needle tip will be left exposed.

The second full paragraph on page 3, beginning approximately at line 78:

An intravenous catheter introducer assembly having a safety feature to prevent accidental needle sticks. The introducer assembly includes a needle assembly having an elongated hollow tubular needle with a proximal end attached to a ~~catheter~~ needle hub and a distal end extending therefrom. The needle has a groove disposed on its outer surface. The introducer includes a protector made of a hollow member having an open distal end and a inwardly disposed resilient flange disposed thereon. The protector is coaxially slidably disposed around the needle with the flange abutting the outer surface of the needle. The introducer also includes a catheter assembly having an elongated hollow tubular catheter with a proximal end attached to a catheter hub and a distal end extending therefrom. The catheter is coaxially disposed about the needle. The catheter hub has a retainer for keeping the protector within the catheter hub until the catheter assembly and needle assembly are separated wherein the flange engages the groove and secures the protector to the needle such that the open distal end of the protector is distal to the distal end of the needle.

The first full paragraph on page 6, beginning approximately at line 152:

As illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 2, IV catheter assembly 20 comprises catheter assembly 22 and needle assembly 24. Needle assembly 24 further includes protector 26. Catheter assembly 22 includes catheter 28 which is a tubular structure having a proximal end 31 and distal end 29. Proximal end 31 of catheter 28 is fixedly attached to catheter hub 30. Catheters are well known in the medical art and one of many suitable materials, most of which are flexible thermoplastics, may be selected for use in catheter 28. Such materials may include, for example, polyurethane or fluorinated ethylene propylene. Catheter hub 30 is a generally tubular structure having an internal cavity in fluid communication with the internal lumen of catheter 28. Catheter hub 30 may be made from a suitable, rigid medical grade thermoplastic such as, for example, polypropylene or polycarbonate. For illustration purposes catheter hub 30 is shown translucent, though in actual use it may be translucent or opaque. At the proximal end of catheter hub 30 is integrally attached Luer fitting 32, commonly known in the medical art. Luer fitting 32 provides for secure, leak proof attachment of tubing, syringes, or any of many other medical devices used to infuse or withdraw fluids through catheter assembly 22. As shown in FIGS. 1, 2, and 5, retainer 60, which is located approximately ~~mid way~~ mid-way between the proximal end and distal end of sidewall 36 and fixedly attached thereto as at shoulder 134, includes aperture 62 which is an opening therethrough. Retainer 60 is generally a doughnut shaped washer made of a material such as, for example, silicone or any other flexible material known to those skilled in the art. As will be described in more detail later, retainer 60 plays an important role in securing protector 26 in catheter hub 30.

The last paragraph beginning on page 6, at approximately line 175, and continuing onto page 7, ending approximately at line 192:

Referring again to FIGS. 1 and 2, needle assembly 24 comprises needle 38, which is a tubular structure with proximal end 39 and distal end 41, needle hub 40, and protector 26. Protector 26 is assembled slidably on needle 38. Needle 38 which is preferably made of stainless steel has a lumen therethrough created by its inner diameter. Proximal end 39 of needle 38 is fixedly attached to needle hub 40. Bevel 42 which is located at distal end 41 of needle 38 creates a sharp piercing tip. Needle groove 44, which includes proximal wall 43 and distal wall 45, is located at distal end 41 of needle 38 proximal to bevel 42 and is smaller in diameter than the nominal outer diameter of needle 38. Needle groove 44 can be created by any number of means known to those skilled in the art. One such method is by machine grinding around the outside diameter of needle 38 resulting in an annular channel between its nominal outer diameter and inner diameter. Machine grinding is a process well known in the metal forming art. The resulting groove 44 is smaller in dimension than the nominal outer diameter of needle 38 but greater in dimension ~~that~~ than the lumen in needle 38 and is important in preventing the complete removal of protector 26 from needle 38, as will be described in more detail later. In the preferred embodiment, the dimension across groove 44 is 0.002 – 0.003 inches smaller than the dimension of the nominal outer diameter of needle 38, dependent upon needle "gauge" size.

The first full paragraph on page 7, beginning at approximately line 194:

Needle hub 40 is generally a tubular structure having an internal cavity in fluid communication with the lumen in needle 38. It is preferably made of a translucent or transparent generally rigid thermoplastic material such as, for example, polycarbonate. At the most proximal end of the internal cavity in needle hub 40 is fixedly attached porous plug 46. A flashback chamber 48 is created in the cavity distal to porous plug 46. Porous plug 46 contains a plurality of microscopic openings which are large enough to permit the passage of air and other gasses but small enough to prevent the passage of blood. Flashback chamber 48 fills with blood upon successful entry of the needle tip into the targeted vein, providing the clinician visual ~~conformation~~ confirmation of the correct placement of the needle.

The first full paragraph beginning on page 8, at approximately line 218:

Referring now to FIGS. 5-7, it can be understood how protector 26 is assembled to needle 38. The proximal end of needle 38 is fixedly attached to the distal end of needle hub 40, which contains porous plug 46 fixedly attached to its proximal end. The distal end of needle 38 is inserted through proximal end 49 of protector 26 and then advanced through cavity 72, moving from proximal to distal. Flange 70 is flexed, as a result of its resilient property, so that needle 38 will pass through cavity 72 of protector 26. Needle groove 44 is located at the distal end of needle 38 just proximal to bevel 42. Groove 44 decreases the diameter of needle 38 locally to a dimension smaller than the nominal outer diameter of needle 38. When needle 38 is retracted, flange 70 locks into groove 44 preventing the complete removal of protector 26 from the distal end of needle 38.